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**Social Development and Adult Education in Bangladesh: A Case Study of  
Three NGOs Involvement**

by

Peter Fenton



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

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## **Abstract**

It is understood that non-formal adult education plays an essential role in the overall programme of development in Bangladesh. As such, Bangladesh is host to a flourishing number of NGOs working towards such educational and development goals. The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine both the current international trend in adult education, with its marked departure from its social purpose origins towards a more economic purpose agenda, and the specific participation in adult education of three Bangladesh NGOs. The findings of the research indicate that the NGO education sector in Bangladesh is struggling to preserve a social purpose agenda, and that efforts are increasingly either directly or indirectly intended solely towards economic development. The thesis concludes that more efforts are needed by, and support given to, those NGOs remaining committed to a social purpose agenda, and particularly to those NGOs implementing in the urban regions of the country.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	1
Introduction to the Research and the Research Problem.....	1
Historical Overview of Bangladesh.....	3
The Political, Social, and Economic Climate of Bangladesh.....	3
The State of Education in Bangladesh.....	7
Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Analysis.....	9
Overview of the Literature.....	9
The Social Purpose Tradition of Adult Education.....	9
Literacy Education.....	15
Community Development Education.....	18
The Need for Urban Development Initiatives.....	21
Micro-credit in Development.....	24
Chapter 3 – Methodology.....	27
Research Paradigm.....	27
Defining the Case Study.....	27
Document Review.....	30
Interviewing.....	31
Validity and Reliability.....	33
Chapter 4 – Findings.....	35
Introduction to the Findings.....	35
PROSHIKA.....	35
PROSHIKA’s Universal Education Programme.....	38
PROSHIKA’s Human Development and Practical Skill Development Training Programs.....	41
BRAC.....	44
USC Canada-Bangladesh.....	47
Summary of Findings.....	50
Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations.....	53
A Change in Development Ideology and Practice.....	53
Community Organization and Socially Productive and Responsible Citizenship.....	56
The Continued Importance of Literacy in International Adult Education.....	58
Future Prospects for Social Development and Adult Education Practice and Research.....	61
References.....	63

## List of Acronyms

BARD.....	Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development
BRAC.....	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAMPE.....	Campaign for Popular Education
CIDA.....	Canadian International Development Agency
EFA.....	Education For All
GDP.....	Gross Domestic Product
GDS.....	Group Development Stage
GNP.....	Gross National Product
NGO.....	Non-Government Organization
RAB.....	Rapid Action Battalion
REFLECT.....	Regenerating Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques
SDC.....	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
TLM.....	Total Literacy Movement
UNICEF.....	United Nations Children's Fund
USC.....	Unitarian Services Canada



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### ***Introduction to the Research and Research Problem***

The purpose of the research reported within this thesis is to investigate the social development education initiatives being carried out by non-government organizations (NGOs) operating in the non-formal adult education sector in urban Bangladesh. The assumption that I have brought to this research, forming the research problem, is that the focus of mainstream adult education (as opposed to NGO implemented non-formal adult education) in Bangladesh is following the same trend that is being seen all over the world: namely that it has largely lost its social purpose agenda, and rather, has become market driven as influenced by the pervasiveness of globalization. This more mainstream type adult education is being conducted in association with development theory predicated on an economic growth development model. This research is grounded in my conviction of the need for identifying and supporting alternative forms of adult education, particularly in developing nations such as Bangladesh, that serve more directly towards social development rather than towards economic development, a conviction forged by my scepticism of the appropriateness of the economic growth development model in general. Thus, the specific question that this research seeks to answer is how are selected NGOs in Bangladesh demonstrating commitment to non-formal adult education policy and practice intended for the purpose of social development. Further, the research is guided by my belief that we are now in a time where international development discourse must better address the growing urban

populations of the developing world, rather than continue to concentrate resources and efforts on the rural regions, as has been the tendency in the past.

The research represented within this thesis has been carried out in accordance with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Further justification for the employment of this approach is provided in Chapter Three; however, it is important from the onset to state “the interpretive/constructivist paradigm emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them” (Mertens, 1998, p. 11). Accordingly, I have understood throughout the research process that the findings of the research would inevitably be shaped to some degree by my own biases, and therefore, I have not overly taxed myself with attempting to control for researcher bias.

Bangladesh, and its capital city Dhaka, was chosen for study in this research based on my familiarity with the country from prior travels, and its perfect suitability as a rapidly urbanizing region of the developing world. Further, as it is noted that “Bangladesh’s NGOs are world renowned” (World Bank, 1999b, p. 43), and are credited for pioneering development practices being adopted and implemented all over the world today, they provide a logical choice for a case study useful in identifying generalizeable international trends. To conduct the fieldwork for this research, I spent three weeks in Bangladesh during January 2005.

### ***Historical Overview of Bangladesh***

Bangladesh has a fascinating and tragic history. Many consider the region to have been twice colonized: first by the British while still belonging to India, and later by Pakistan following India's independence and partition in 1947. Bangladesh itself was not born until 1971, following its liberation war against West Pakistan. The mass genocide, rape, and crimes against humanity that led up to and continued during that war remain an ugly scar on history. Since liberation, Bangladesh has had an extremely precarious political climate, spending as much time under military rule and martial law as it has under various weak forms of democracy. Added to its political instability, the country has been the victim of innumerable natural disasters, famines, and state corruption. Further, the exodus of much of the region's Hindu population has starved Bangladesh of its traditional Bengali culture. As such, since its birth, the country has struggled enormously on the path towards development: economically, socially, and culturally.

### ***The Political, Social, and Economic Climate of Bangladesh***

Bangladesh is currently a democratic state with two main political parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, taking turns in power from near evenly split votes in every-five-year elections. The Awami League is considered to be the more liberal of the two parties, with its platform built on the tenants of Bangladesh's original national constitution, which included clauses prescribing secularism and socialism. The party is headed by Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the assassinated Sheik Mujib who was the forefather of the independent

Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, on the other hand, is considered to be the more conservative of the two. The party is headed by Khaleda Zia, widow of the also assassinated General Zia who seized power after the slaying of Sheik Mujib, and whose first order of business was to strike the clauses of socialism and secularism from the country's constitution. In the most recent election, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party regained power by forming an alliance with three smaller fringe parties, all extremely conservative. One party in particular, the Jamaat-e-Islami, is recognized for its blatant propagation of a fundamentalist agenda. As a result of this alliance, somewhat of a fundamentalist insurgence has recently begun to appear in a country known traditionally for its more moderate and tolerant form of Islam (Seabrook, 2004).

Accompanying this political swing has been a malignant social degradation: crime, violence, and discrimination against minority groups all symptoms of the ever more tumultuous social landscape. In response to a growing criminal element, the government recently created the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), known to act as an assassination squad for suspected criminals and members of illegal (communist) political parties. In the three weeks I spent in Bangladesh in January 2005, over forty people were reported killed by RAB squads, an apparently government sanctioned gross violation of human and legal rights. There is also a growing element of terrorism, with grenade attacks, suicide bombings, and political assassinations becoming near daily events, and an elusive Bangla Bai, the Osama

Bin Laden of Bangladesh, boasting responsibility from his hideout in the Chittagong Hills.

Bangladesh remains an extremely impoverished country. The most recent available data shows that in 2000, 83% of the country's population subsisted on less than two dollars per day, and 36% on less than one dollar per day (World Bank, 2004). Traditionally, the bulk of this poverty has been found in the rural areas of the country, but as Bangladesh continues to rapidly urbanize, a shift is occurring and a new form of socio-economic poverty infusing into its cities. In urban areas, the number of homeless and those with insecure land tenure are ever increasing, and unemployment and underemployment are becoming epidemic. The percentage of those living below the national poverty line, while decreasing nationally, is increasing in the urban regions. There is, however, also a rapidly growing upper class and resulting concentration of wealth in Dhaka. The city has modernized enormously since my last visit in 1993. Where twelve years ago, few buildings stood more than two stories high, there are now hundreds of towering buildings, the streets below filled with new luxury cars and SUVs. In a one-kilometre stretch of road in Gulshan (an up-market district in Dhaka) I counted 22 banks, all of them in the most modern buildings. Clearly, however, the 'trickle-down' isn't happening, and as noted by the World Bank (1999b), wealth inequality in Bangladesh's urban areas is progressively worsening. Surrounding all this new wealth are reminders of why Bangladesh is still ranked 138<sup>th</sup> in human development in the world, having one of the worst GDPs per capita in all of Asia (UNDP, 2004). Swerving amongst the

luxury vehicles are the city's six hundred thousand bicycle rickshaws, their wallahs<sup>1</sup> often young boys earning just enough to feed themselves; street children picking through heaps of solid waste in search of anything of value mistakenly thrown out; and the sick, elderly, disabled, and widowed, unprotected by their government and forced to beg for their livelihoods.

Of significant concern to the development process in Bangladesh is the systemic corruption in the country, the worst in the world for the past three years according to Transparency International (McAdam, 2004). An estimated 75% of the foreign assistance that Bangladesh has received since its founding in 1971 has been stolen by corrupt individuals before reaching the masses which it was intended for ("Criminalization," 2005). This corruption affects all public sectors, education not excluded. The Government of Bangladesh's Directorate for Non-formal Education, along with its benchmark programme the Total Literacy Movement (its acronym TLM now sarcastically referred to as Total Loss of Money), has recently been disbanded due to ineffectiveness resulting directly from corruption. Even NGO activity in the education sector is often victim, with work tenders awarded through corrupt channels to what are referred to as briefcase organizations that have no intent, or even the means by which, to implement programming. Under constant threat of withdrawal of international donor assistance, the Government of Bangladesh has recently established an Anti-corruption Commission to take over from the now defunct Bureau of Anti-corruption, which, ironically, was shut down due to inefficiencies blamed on corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> A rickshaw driver. Typically they do not own, but rent the rickshaw each day to earn their wage.

### *The State of Education in Bangladesh*

Bangladesh's current human development ranking of 138<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries is calculated based on three index ratings: a life expectancy index, a GDP index, and an education index. Of the 39 countries with a lower total human development rating, none has a higher life expectancy index value than does Bangladesh. The same, however, cannot be said about the GDP and education index values. Seven of the 39 lower ranked countries have higher GDP indexes, and 22 of the 39 lower ranked countries have higher education indexes, thereby placing Bangladesh in the bottom twenty of education ranking in the world. Further, there are, according to the most recent data available, only nine countries in the world with a worse adult literacy rate. Moreover, Bangladesh has one of the worst female adult literacy compared to male adult literacy rates in the world, the male rate twice the female in 2002 (UNDP, 2004). It is also worth mention that the absolute lowest adult literacy rates and worst female to male ratios in the country are found in the urban slum areas of Dhaka (Ahmed, Nath, & Ahmed, 2003).

In its annual publication *Education Watch*, CAMPE, a well-established and internationally reputable Bangladesh NGO, reported that a mere 1.6% of students are successful in achieving all the terminal competencies of the Bangladesh primary public school curriculum (Chowdhury, Choudhury, Nath, Ahmed, & Alam, 2001). Further, despite primary school now being mandatory in Bangladesh, CAMPE reports a national primary enrolment rate of only 82%. This rate varies significantly by region, with the lowest enrolment at 58% found in the urban slum areas

(Chowdhury, Nath, Choudhury, & Ahmed, 2002, p. 54). Upon this precarious foundation, the rest of the public education system in Bangladesh is built, and, as a result, the private and the NGO education sectors have found their niches and are flourishing. For those who can afford it, private education begins in the often English medium primary schools and concludes in one of the over fifty private universities in Dhaka (as compared to the two public universities). For the huge majority who cannot afford private education, and have fallen through the gaping cracks of the public education system, NGO education is the last resort. Therefore, it is the one avenue of education that reaches the absolutely most desperate and needy people in the country, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to focus this research on NGO education programmes. Further, NGOs are in the advantageous position of being able to offer whatever type of education programmes they wish, being less influenced by the pressures of local and foreign governments to comply with a market driven curriculum. This increased state of autonomy provides NGOs the freedom to pursue what Jack Mezirow (1985) would call education that matters, and as such, many NGOs in Bangladesh are still clinging to the type of educational programmes which support an ever waning social development agenda.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review & Analysis**

### ***Overview of the Literature***

A profound discovery made during this research is how apparently obscure Bangladesh is to the Western World, a condition clearly reflected in the available related literature. An ERIC search for journal articles using key words 'Bangladesh' and 'adult education' resulted in a mere eight hits, only one of which was authored in the last ten years. Key words 'Bangladesh' and 'non-formal education' resulted in four hits; 'Bangladesh' and 'social development' resulted in zero. For a regional comparison, replacing 'Bangladesh' with 'India' in each search resulted in 225, 51, and seven hits respectively. There is clearly a gap in the research and literature on the topic of this thesis, and as a result the following review is based on literature more thematically and topically generic than specific to social development adult education in Bangladesh. This gap in the literature, however, provides testimony for the importance of this research and the need for further research on this topic in the future.

### ***The Social Purpose Tradition of Adult Education***

The theoretical underpinnings of this thesis rest almost entirely upon a distinction between two types of adult education, or rather a distinction between types of adult education designed to serve two different purposes. On the one hand, there is what Welton (1998) refers to as the great tradition of adult education, that which serves towards a social purpose agenda. On the other hand, there is the more

currently vogue design of adult education, that which serves towards an economic purpose agenda.

The social purpose tradition was bred in the roots of the adult education discipline, and as such there are vast amounts of available literature (e.g. Scott, Spencer & Thomas, 1998; Selman, Selman, Cooke & Dampier, 1998) highlighting the historical development of this type of adult education. This social purpose tradition is described by Fieldhouse as:

providing individuals with knowledge which they can use collectively to change society if they so wish, and particularly equipping members of the working class with the intellectual tools to play a full role in a democratic society or to challenge the inequalities and injustices of society in order to bring about radical social change (Cited in Johnston, 1999, p. 176).

Johnston (1999) adds to that definition, "its key values can be identified as social justice, greater social and economic equality, the promotion of critical democracy, a vision of a better, fairer world where education has a key role to play" (p. 176). Taylor (1997) describes the tenants of social purpose education as the emancipation of disadvantaged groups, political empowerment, elevation of the working class, and disruption of the status quo. Numerous theories and practices of adult education have been guided by the general philosophy of the social purpose

tradition over the years: critical, popular, radical, Freirian, and transformative to name a few.

In contrast to this historical social purpose tradition is a more current distortion of the discipline, ushered in with the rhetoric of 'learning societies' and 'learning organizations', backed up by the now unchecked forward march of market capitalism and neo-liberal policy reform. This new flavour of adult education is becoming extremely invasive, working its way into a myriad of national and international policies under the auspices of lifelong learning. In this new paradigm, adult education has become a tool to be used for individual betterment rather than group empowerment, by championing instrumental training, competencies, skills, credentials, employability, and upward mobility. As several authors have stated, (e.g. Kerka, 1996; Martin, 2003; Martin & Shaw, 1997; & Morin, 1998) adult education has become commodified and market driven, the goal now being the development of human capital. As Morin succinctly describes it, "in the dominant paradigm, education follows society's general pattern, the industrial model, which has as its objective the production of skilled workers and is not concerned with human development" (p. 64). Solar (1998), through a study of scholarly publications to define the trends of adult education in the 1990s, confirms that the current concerns are predominantly with the economy and workplace training, and that themes of popular education, literacy, and adult development are all quickly fading away.

While much of the literature diagnosing this trend pertains to North America and Western Europe, it certainly also holds true in the developing world, where the so called conventional wisdom prescribes that adult education should be demand driven to produce people with technical and vocational skills that align with locally emerging economies. The following quote, taken from a World Bank document, although specific to Sub-Saharan Africa rather than South Asia, illustrates this perfectly:

Education and training are sound investments for the individual, the employer, and the economy. Skills development for participants in the labour force is important in Sub-Saharan Africa today for several reasons. Technological change and the increased competition flowing from trade liberalization require higher skills and productivity among workers. Skilled workers are more readily able to adapt existing knowledge and processes. Growing, competitive economies benefit from their presence and their movement to productive employment. (Johanson and Adams, 2004, p. 1)

This trend towards a solely economic development purpose of adult education is receiving criticism in the literature. As Cunningham (2000) rhetorically poses, “the question remains: Who is served by HRD [human resource development]?” (p. 578). It has been clearly exposed that this current purpose for adult education has come hand-in-hand with the phenomenon of globalization. As

many (e.g. Cunningham, 2000; Federighi, 1997; Korsgaard, 1997; Wilson, 1999) have pointed to, globalization in fact directly depends upon systems of education to produce the learning societies necessary for trans-national capitalism to exploit and flourish. Cunningham thus argues that the entire notion of lifelong learning has become exploited, and that, "as it now stands, is divisive and drives education towards promoting commodity production not quality living" (p. 579). Wilson (1999) takes an even stronger position by concluding that:

I suggest with the present analysis that the rhetoric of lifelong learning and the learning society is really a disguise for the construction and exercise of power, power that sustains relationships of domination and maintains systems of exclusion. Adult educators in creating dependency through the exercise of knowledge-power regimes contribute directly to forming cultural identities that support these dominant relations of power, power that operates in favour of those already advantaged. In a multi-national, post-Fordist economy, adult educators' collusion in helping to produce lifelong learning, learning societies, and learning organizations by contributing to produce adults as 'flexible', 'adaptable', and 'docile' learners do not only directly disempower adult learners but may also hasten their own dependency and enthrallment to the very powers they now enthusiastically serve. (p. 92)

La Belle (2000) and Merriam and Brockett (1997) blame this turn in adult education and the de-railing of the social purpose tradition on a lack of ideological purpose, which, I believe, is an inaccurate assessment. Ideology is defined by Funk and Wagnalls (1989) as, “The ideas or manner of thinking characteristic of an individual or group; especially, the ideas and objectives that influence a whole group or national culture, shaping especially their political and social procedure” (p. 665). The lack of ideology noted by both La Belle and Merriam and Brockett is simply wistful of their nostalgic reminiscence of the ideology which accompanies the social purpose tradition. Current mainstream adult education could not be more steeped in ideology, a market oriented ideology that sets out purposefully to deconstruct the last remaining fragments of the welfare state. As Martin (2003) explains:

I wish to argue that the dominant discourse of lifelong learning (there still are some others!) is in danger, increasingly, of functioning primarily as a political ideology and instrument of social policy – and that it does so, seemingly paradoxically, by becoming a substitute for policy. It is in terms of what lifelong learners are expected to learn that the *deconstruction* of welfare, as an ideological and policy objective, is predicated upon the *reconstruction* of citizenship....We keep getting it wrong because we keep trying to talk about lifelong learning in educational rather than political terms. (pp. 566-567)

While the criticisms being levied against a purely economic growth oriented adult education trend are plentiful in the literature, what appears to be lacking is a position calling for balance; there is a tendency towards all or nothing type arguments. Given the broader economic and political conditions of the world and the ideology propagated by them, it would be foolishly naïve to simply wish away this new paradigm of adult education. Instead, what is needed is a way for the old and the new to be combined. What is missing, then, is more literature that recognizes the need for a balance to be found between the two types of adult education. As Xun (1994) concludes:

It might be said that we have learned from history that neither the economic function of adult education nor its social/moral function should be over-stressed to the disadvantage of the other. Particularly, in today's unstable world, in an age filled with tension and economic competition, the all-round implementation of adult education's two essential functions has never been more important. (p. 108)

### *Literacy Education*

Literacy training remains an important inroad to social purpose adult education. the work of Paulo Freire a shining example of how the two can be complementarily and effectively combined. Global EFA and literacy initiatives from Jomtien and Dakar have made it so developing nations must earmark at least some portion of their educational development resources and efforts towards adult

literacy. Therefore, literacy programmes provide a line of defence against the new paradigm of adult education by preventing the complete vocationalization of the practice.

Jennings (1990) provides insight into the past thinking and strategies towards adult literacy development in Bangladesh. Citing from various Government of Bangladesh documents from the 1980s, he highlights a recurrent phrase: "Literacy is an important prerequisite for development" (p. 67). From this point of understanding, the Government of Bangladesh launched a series of mass literacy campaigns, the results of which leave much to be desired. At just 41%, Bangladesh has the worst adult literacy rate, and the second worst female as percent of male literacy rate, of all the countries in its surrounding region (UNPD, 2002). After nearly 30 years of these mass literacy campaign efforts, the last of them, the TLM, was finally accepted as ineffective and abandoned two years ago.

With few notable exceptions, such as that seen in Cuba, similar literacy campaigns in most parts of the world have had similar fates. Jennings (1990) blames the scope of these mass campaigns as being too narrow, and states that simply mechanistic and detached methods of literacy training have proven repeatedly inadequate. Instead, Jennings calls upon literacy training programmes that are target group and context specific and that, rather than standing alone, are incorporated into integrated educational development approaches. The importance of using a contextual approach for literacy training to be effective is more recently



noted by Druine and Wildemeersch (2000), citing the necessity of recognising “the actual contexts in which literacy is valued, acquired, practised, used, abused or neglected” (Graff cited in Druine and Wildemeersch, p. 395). Sato (2004) also calls for the use of more contextual approaches, explaining that in the traditional approaches, “literacy is narrowly and externally defined as a set of technical skills that convey similarly narrowly and externally defined development messages from the literate developers to the ‘illiterate’” (p. 75).

Clearly the literacy literature is vast, and what has been considered good practice has varied enormously over context and time. Nevertheless, the literature most current on the topic almost unanimously calls for literacy development practices that are contextual, participatory, and communicative based. Sato (2004) presents two specific models which embody these themes and have been proven effective in parts of the developing world: REFLECT and The Community Literacy Approach. REFLECT, being grounded in Freirean methods, involves the use of generative words from participants’ existing knowledge, and the critical investigation of issues and consciousness raising activities. The Community Literacy Approach focuses literacy training on daily literacy tasks, recognizes the importance of the oral tradition of many communities, and purposefully grafts onto existing community organizations for implementation. It is noteworthy that both of these programmes have a focus on the community for both development and means of implementation. The community at large becomes both the target group, providing specific context for the training, and the support structure, providing

organization which allows for participation. Community, then, becomes a critical entity for development.

### ***Community Development Education***

There is much to be taken from the literature on community development and community education. Jennings (1990) and Begum, Ahmed, and Chowdhury (1996) describe the history of community development practices in Bangladesh. Initially, efforts were made towards a programme of total community development, based on the then common assumption that any resources added into a community would eventually benefit all of the community's members. This 'trickle down' approach, however, proved incredibly incorrect. Instead of an even distribution, wealth and power began to concentrate at the top, and those already impoverished and disenfranchised became even more so. Responding to these failures, a change of approach was made in Bangladesh near the time of liberation. As Jennings reports, "one of the most important strategies developed by the NGOs during the past two decades is the rejection of the overall community development in favour of the target group approach" (p. 65). These target groups are made up of those within the community at large who are the most impoverished and disenfranchised, the goal being for bottom up rather than top down development.

The idea of total community development, then, had become somewhat passé. However, a more recent literature is attempting to revive the notion of community development by highlighting the necessary, and often previously

overlooked, relationship between community development and community education. Lovett (1997) explains, “until recently, this link between community education and community development had not been fully appreciated” (p. 39). As Lovett and others (e.g. Scott & Ellis, 2003; Van Der Veen, 2003) report, the practice of community development is, and must be, an educational process. From this revived vantage point, there is good reason to re-explore the potential of the total community development approach.

In his analysis of community development, Lovett (1997) breaks community education into three categories: education *for* the community, education *about* the community, and education *with* the community. Each of these categories has a variation in approach and intended outcome. The first category, education *for* the community, is noted as being better matched with “personal satisfaction and development” and “not closely linked to the process of community development, with its concern for collective action and tackling social, economic, and cultural issues and problems” (p. 40). The second category, education *about* the community, is reported as being better matched with community development in that “it attempts to meet it [community development] by engaging in dialogue and discussion with local groups within the community about the sort of issues and problems around which classes and courses might be organised” (p. 40). It is noted, however, that within this type of community education, “the response is still seen in terms of providing classes and courses. It is essentially an educational one, with limited

engagement in the actual learning process of community development” (p. 40). The third category, education *with* the community, on the other hand:

is about taking part and experiencing, not listening in a passive way to a teacher....In this learning situation the usual sort of educational criteria for judging success may not apply. Instead, it must be judged in terms of capacity building, group development and empowerment, coupled with the achievements of social, economic, cultural and environmental targets and objectives. (p. 40)

Van Der Veen (2003) also claims there to be three categories of community education within community development practice: education as training, education as consciousness rising, and education as service delivery. Van Der Veen’s categories do not overlap perfectly with Lovett’s, but there are definite similarities, particularly between Van Der Veen’s education as consciousness rising, and some combination of Lovett’s education *about* and *with* the community. The focus of both is in the challenging of existing social conditions, and the raising of awareness leading towards action resulting in the development of the community. What is crucial to recognize is that for both Lovett and Van Der Veen, the focus is on the development of the community at large, not just target groups within communities.

### ***The Need for Urban Development Initiatives***

Urban populations all over the developing world are growing at unprecedented rates. According to the United Nations Population Division (2002), less developed countries accounted for only 55% of the total global urban population increase in the five-year period from 1950 to 1955. In the five-year period from 1995 to 2000, however, that number had risen to 93%, and is expected to reach 96% by 2030. Moreover, the total world population is forecast to grow 2.2 billion between 2000 and 2030, two billion of which is expected to be in the urban areas of the developing world. As a result, urban dwellers, who accounted for less than 20% of the population of less developed countries in 1955, will account for well over 50% of the population of less developed countries by 2030.

Bangladesh's population demographic illustrates this trend perfectly. Data from the United Nations (Human Development Reports: 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004) show Bangladesh's urban percent of total population to be steadily increasing, while its rural percent of total population is steadily decreasing. In 2001, Dhaka's population of 13.2 million was the eighth highest city population in the world. By 2015, the population is expected to reach 22.8 million, second then only to Tokyo (United Nations Population Division, 2002). Some of this urban population growth can be attributed to natural population increases (birth rates exceeding death rates), but much of the increase is the result of rural to urban migration. Each year in Bangladesh, hundreds of thousands of people move into Dhaka, many by choice in search of a better way of life, and many forced from their rural dwellings by

flooding, riverbank erosion, land cultivation, and eviction (Afsar, 2000). Unfortunately, many of those who migrate to Dhaka in search of a higher standard of living find themselves far worse off than if they had stayed in their rural communities. It is estimated that 93% of those dwelling in the unknown number of slums<sup>2</sup> in Dhaka are migrants from rural areas (Ullah, Rahman, & Murshed, 1999).

As this population concentrates in Dhaka, so does poverty. Since 1995, the percent of the urban population in Bangladesh living below the poverty line has risen from 29.4 to 36.6 percent. In that same period, the percent of rural population living below the poverty line has decreased from 55.2 to 53 percent (The World Bank: 1998, 1999a, 2000, 2004). International development practice, from its onset, has generally been aimed at the rural areas of developing countries, the areas that in the past have accounted for the vast majority of these countries' populations and poverty. However, as both population and poverty become more concentrated into the urban areas, it is time to refocus and redirect development resources accordingly. No longer is it appropriate to assume that those living in cities are better off and less needing of development assistance than those living in the country.

In particular, support needs to be provided for those who have migrated from rural to urban areas. Gustafson (1993) writes that "over the course of the next several decades few processes will have greater impact than urbanization on many

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the number of slums in Dhaka vary wildly, from as low as 1,125 to as high as 22,000. This variation can be attributed to by several factors, including: inclusion or exclusion of small slums, protection of illegal slums, and the almost continual establishment, relocation, and eviction of slums.

social, political, economic, and environmental problems. How the newly arrived urban inhabitants adapt and contribute to society is a critical issue” (p. 53). Further, he goes on to say “the population of urban migrants in developing countries presents numerous challenges for adult educators. The tasks they face in adapting to a different culture, in acquiring new job skills, and in surviving in generally hostile conditions are daunting” (p. 56). Patel (1998) supports this argument by writing, “in all the internal assessments of what sustains the communities of the poor in their quest for secure habitation in the cities, we identify the strength of the education process as the most vital element” (p. 92). Patel goes on further to say, “as more and more people migrate in search of better prospects, this migration is creating the need for knowledge about how to survive and acclimatize to the new habitat” (p. 94).

On top of more general social development needs, it is understood that urban environments pose their own specific development challenges. Uddin (2002), writing about Dhaka, explains that “such urbanisations are manifest in mass poverty, gross inequality, high unemployment, underemployment, overcrowded housing, proliferation of slums and squatters, insufficient social services, violence, crimes, and environmental degradation.” Gangopadhyay and Nath (2001) describe the “sheer social and economic disaster” of cities in the developing world, which they note “are often a home ground for poverty, destitution and deprivation” (p. 207). Marsella (1998) adds that urbanization leads to cultural conflict and disintegration amongst a myriad of other psycho-social disorders, and concludes that “in my view, the rapid growth of urban centres and their attendant problems, especially in

developing countries, pose numerous challenges to individual, societal, and global mental health and well-being” (p. 632).

### ***Micro-credit in Development***

In Bangladesh, development practice and micro-credit have become somewhat synonymous; it is almost impossible to speak of one without mention of the other. Much of the micro-credit literature (e.g. Fjortoft, 1999; Hoque, 2004; Lazar, 2004) commonly acclaims the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh as being the pioneer of micro-credit programmes, and still largest micro-credit lender in the world. BRAC is also commonly noted as a micro-credit organization being modeled in many parts of the developing world. The birth of micro-credit in Bangladesh coincided with the move towards the target group approach. Many of Bangladesh’s NGOs, including BRAC and PROSHIKA, were founded on, and continue to be largely supported by, their micro-credit lending activities. It is indisputable that without these micro-credit activities, such organizations would no longer be able to support their other programmes to anywhere near the same capacity.

Micro-credit programmes, as described in the literature, are all marked by the same basic process. A small group is organized and first provided with some form of capacity development training, then given a small amount of money to invest towards some form of income generating activity. The group is made responsible for the management of the money and the accountability of its members to pay back their individual portions of the loan. If one member defaults, the other members



must either coerce that member into repayment, or cover that member so as to not become ineligible as a group for further loans. Usually tied to the loans are expectations that the group members participate in various types of educational and social development activities. As such, micro-credit programmes often boast contribution towards both economic and social development.

The micro-credit literature does vary in its degree of support as to the usefulness and effectiveness of the practice. While Fjortoft (1999) proclaims that the "Grameen Bank is much more than a bank; it is a social movement which has given millions of people all over the world a new hope and opportunities to overcome their poverty" (p. 39), Hoque (2004) explains that the findings of his study "leads to the conclusion that micro-credit had negligible impact on the reduction of poverty" (p. 27). Hoque further asserts, that considering the large amounts of subsidy from international agencies and the huge shift in allocation of state funds to support these micro-credit programmes, it is essential that there be a very clear understanding of their true impact. Lazar (2004) also takes a critical position against micro-credit programmes. Her dissatisfaction of them is based not only on their ineffectiveness in alleviating poverty, particularly for those at the extreme margins of poverty, but also that micro-credit programmes perpetuate the neo-liberal ideology and market-based economic rationality which seeks to create "'empowered' individual, entrepreneurial, active citizens who will take responsibility for their own and their families' welfare, and who are prepared for the market rather than the state to provide for them" (p. 302). Further, Lazar suggests

that the social programmes and human development training which NGOs offer in conjunction with micro-credit, particularly those which specifically target women, are merely in place to illicit funds from donor agencies with gender policies tied to their aid support.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### ***Research Paradigm***

Guba and Lincoln prescribe that the operative paradigm for any educational research should be selected based on the researcher's personal epistemological, ontological, and methodological inclinations (Cited in Mertens, 1998). Accordingly, the research for this thesis was conducted within the parameters of the interpretive/constructivist paradigm. As such, following my own epistemological and ontological convictions, I have made few efforts to separate my or others personal values from the research, its findings, or the knowledge generated through the research. Further, I have carried out this research based on the understanding that there are indeed multiple potential realities which exist as the products of various social constructions. Finally, as I believe it is best complementary to these particular epistemological and ontological convictions, this research aimed to generate primarily qualitative evidence more so than quantitative data, and, therefore, employed what Mertens cites as being the most commonly used qualitative research methods: document review, interviewing, and observation.

#### ***Defining the Case Study***

At the time of proposal for this research I had just learned of a large and well-established Bangladesh NGO named PROSHIKA. My introduction to this NGO was through Seabrook's (2001) *Freedom Unfinished*, a book not specifically about PROSHIKA, but one that makes several references to the organization and the type of work it does in Bangladesh. From Seabrook's book, I gathered that the

organization was one committed to programmes for social development and the empowerment of oppressed groups, particularly women, and one that recognizes and uses education as its principal tool for these development programmes. The organization had been founded near the time that Paulo Freire was revolutionizing international adult education and had embraced many of his development theories and ideas into its practices. PROSHIKA, I also learned, had recently established an urban development programme, which suited my urban interests perfectly. It appeared that I had found the perfect subject organization upon which to define my case study.

As I began my research, however, the reason of Schon's (Cited in Wellington, 2000) warning, that data gathering can be a political process which can result in the impediment of access, became apparent. I soon learned that in the last election in Bangladesh, PROSHIKA played a partisan role in campaigning for the Awami League. When the Bangladesh Nationalist Party alliance won the election, PROSHIKA became an enemy of the government. Relations between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and PROSHIKA quickly went from bad to worse, leading eventually to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party blocking all external funding to PROSHIKA, in essence, crippling the organization's development programmes. In June 2004, several of PROSHIKA's leaders were jailed for complicity and charged with sedition after a nationwide hartal (Seabrook, 2004). Hartals (legal general work strikes called by the opposition government) are incredibly common in Bangladesh: there were three days of hartal in the three weeks I was in Bangladesh

in January 2005. It is difficult to understand how the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, which had itself called over 60 hartals in the previous five years as the opposition government, could punish those in PROSHIKA for participating in, or even organizing, an activity protected in Bangladesh as a democratic right. Nevertheless, in light of these current events, it became clear that PROSHIKA was going to be a very difficult organization upon which to solely base a case study, as many of its programmes had been put on hold due to funding constraints, many of the staff laid off, and most of the remaining staff far less forthcoming in discussing PROSHIKA's activities and politics for fear of persecution. Even CIDA, which had recently concluded a five year multi-million dollar partnership with PROSHIKA, would provide very little information about the organization or their relationship.

As such, I decided to change the case study from a depth to a breadth approach, re-working the research question from 'How is PROSHIKA pursuing social development through adult education programming' to 'How are NGOs in Bangladesh pursuing social development through adult education programming?' Rather than focusing the case study on PROSHIKA alone, I expanded it to include two other NGOs: BRAC, and USC Canada-Bangladesh. To help round out the research, I also collected documents and interviewed representatives from other various government, non-government, and private organizations in Bangladesh, including CARE, CAMPE, UNICEF, BARD, SDC, and the High Commission of Canada.

### *Document Review*

As cited earlier in this chapter, document review is noted as a commonly employed method within qualitative research. Wellington (2000) describes documentary research as a method for the collection of secondary source data, which can either stand alone or be used in conjunction with primary source data collected through other methods. Further, Wellington explains how the document review method can be incorporated at any of the following three stages of research: the exploratory stage, the complementary stage, or the concluding stage. In the case of this research, document review was used in all three. Before going to Bangladesh, the document review process was both used to better frame the topic and sensitize myself to the context of the study. During my time in Bangladesh, collected documents were used to enrich and crosscheck the evidence being generated through the interviews and observations. Once home again, a continued document review was used to support and clarify the findings of the research in order to help synthesize my conclusions.

Documents for review were procured through various sources at various times during the research. Initially, the websites for the NGOs to be studied provided such critical information as each NGO's particular theoretical and philosophical orientation, general framework and structure, and relative scope of involvement in social development programming. From the websites I was able to immediately identify similarities and trends in the adult education programmes being offered by the NGOs, and better focus my lines of query. Once in Bangladesh, I was

able to access various publications not available in Canada. From each of the NGOs I was able to collect and analyse such pertinent documents as annual reports, policy papers, training guides, and promotional materials. Aside from those documents provided by the NGOs, I was also able to collect Government of Bangladesh policy documents, academic journals from the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, various locally published books, and relevant articles from *The Daily Star*, Bangladesh's reputedly most free press newspaper. Having drawn documents from such varied sources provided a sound basis for a critical document review and analysis.

### ***Interviewing***

Interviewing is another commonly used method in qualitative research, and as such, I chose to use interviews for primary source evidence generation. I use the term 'evidence' rather than 'data' in accordance with Stenhouse's (1978) distinction between the two terms, evidence being the more appropriate for interpretive/constructivist research with its ontological conviction of multiple potential socially constructed realities. As further explained by Wellington (2000), the interview method best complements the interpretive/constructivist paradigm in that it is not intended to uncover some type of salient truth, but rather to illicit the multiple truths of personal opinions, values, and perceptions.

The style of interviews conducted in this research fell much closer to the unstructured than the structured end of the continuum. For each interview I prepared

a specific list of questions to act as initial prompts, but encouraged the interviewees to freely respond to these questions and speak outside of these questions as much as possible. The decision to follow a less structured approach was made based on the fact that there were many unknowns and uncontrollable circumstances in each interview that may have resulted in a more structured interview being less productive. The amount of time available for each interview, the English competency of the interviewees, and the degree of guardedness pertaining to more politically or culturally sensitive questions are examples of circumstances which may have rendered a more structured interview less fruitful. Using a less structured format also alleviated the need for a pilot interview, for which, under the circumstances, there was insufficient time. In total, fourteen interviews, of length varying from fifteen minutes to one hour, were conducted over the period of three weeks.

Informants for the interviews were selected from each of the case studied and supplementary organizations on the basis of their expertise on the subject and involvement with programmes most relevant to the study. In most cases I was able to interview those individuals directly involved with the organizations' social development and education programmes. I began each interview with an introduction of the topic and full disclosure of my research intent and purpose for the information generated through the interview. Interviewees were assured of their anonymity and the safe keeping of the evidence gathered through the interview



process. In most cases, I was later able to contact via e-mail those I had interviewed in order to verify interview records or ask further questions if necessary.

In the initial research proposal, I had stated my intent to electronically record and later transcribe all interview sessions. However, once I became aware of the politically sensitive conditions surrounding my research, I opted instead to take handwritten notes during interviews. This decision was made based on Wellington's (2000) warning that by electronically recording an interview, the researcher risks intimidating the interviewee, and thus losing his or her full and honest disclosure. It is my belief, particularly for those associated with PROSHIKA, that electronically recording the interviews would have indeed jeopardised the complete candidacy of the interviewees. For the sake of consistency, I followed the same method in each interview setting, even those where the interviewees felt safer and electronically recording the interviews would not have been detrimental.

### ***Validity and Reliability***

Wellington (2000) asserts that the concepts of validity and reliability are contentious in educational research, particularly within qualitative research conducted within the parameters of interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Mertens (1998) also discredits the applicability of the two concepts in qualitative research, declaring that they need instead be replaced with *credibility* (parallels internal validity), *transferability* (parallels external validity), and *dependability* (parallels

reliability). To that end, academic rigor in this research is maintained through ensuring sufficient measures of each of these three concepts.

Mertens explains that one way in which credibility is upheld is through processes of triangulation. Accordingly, both data and methodological triangulation (Wellington, 2000) have been employed, by collecting both primary and secondary source data from stakeholders both internal and external to each of the NGOs studied. Transferability is said to be upheld through thick description, defined as the “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” (Mertens, 1998, p. 183), and the use of multiple cases, both of which have been provided for in this thesis. Finally, dependability, according to Mertens, requires that the researcher track any procedures in the research and identify any changes in protocol. For that, a detailed account of the research process has been maintained, and all changes in protocol (i.e. the change from a depth to a breadth approach in the case study) noted in this thesis document.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### *Introduction to the Findings*

The findings reported in this chapter have been divided into sections representing each of the three main NGOs studied: PROSHIKA, BRAC, and USC Canada-Bangladesh. The findings in each section are based on a collaboration of the evidence collected through interviews, observations, and documentary research for each of these NGOs. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, which draws together the evidence collected from each of the three main NGOs, as well as the supplementary evidence collected from interviewing other various organizations and individuals in Bangladesh, and reviewing other relevant documents.

### *PROSHIKA*

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, PROSHIKA is, at present, under severe political and budgetary constraints which have drastically reduced the organizations ability to implement programming. Nevertheless, much of the organization's infrastructure and framework are still in place, and PROSHIKA is poised to pick up where it left off as one of Bangladesh's largest and most influential education NGOs at the next political swing.

The following vision, mission, and objectives statements, as shown in a PROSHIKA (2002b) training guide, are useful in providing a clear account of the organization's commitment to fostering social development through poverty alleviation:

Vision: PROSHIKA envisages a society which is economically productive and equitable, socially just, environmentally sound, and genuinely democratic.

Mission: PROSHIKA's mission is to conduct an extensive, intensive, and participatory process of sustainable development through empowerment of the poor.

Objectives: PROSHIKA's objectives are: I) structural poverty alleviation; II) environmental protection and regeneration; III) improvement in women's status; IV) increasing people's participation in public institutions, and V) increasing people's capacity to gain and exercise democratic and human rights. (pp.5-6)

PROSHIKA's framework is organized around the development of core assemblies of people, called Primary Groups, from within communities, in alignment with the previously described target group approach. Each of these Primary Groups is made up of 20 gender-segregated adults. Group members are selected based on various criteria, such as their degree of poverty, landlessness, and illiteracy. To date, nearly 150,000 of these Primary Groups have been established across Bangladesh, approximately two-thirds of which are women's groups.

Selected members from these Primary Groups form federations at the village, slum, union, and upazila levels, which are then responsible for the decision-making and governance of each of the local Primary Groups. PROSHIKA personnel are on site at the federation level to help organize and implement programming, but the day-to-day management of the Primary Groups is handled internally by the group members.

During my first interview with PROSHIKA, it became apparent that when discussing adult learning, a clear distinction is made between *education* and *training*. The acronym, PROSHIKA, I learned, in fact, is made up of the following three Bangla words: *proshikkhan* (training), *shikkha* (education), and *karmo* (action). This distinction between education and training I later found to be consistent amongst all of the organizations and individuals I met with in Bangladesh. As it is, education, in an adult context, is solely used to refer to basic education, or more simply, basic literacy. Training is used to refer to basically anything else that an adult might endeavour to learn, including any skills considered requisite for social development. There appears to be some resistance to not maintaining this distinction and keeping the two separate in both theory and practice.

PROSHIKA provides both education and training for adults. Education is facilitated through the Universal Education Programme, with its adult literacy and post literacy components specifically intended for adult learners. Training is facilitated through two separate, but often combined, programs: the Human

Development Training Programme and the Practical Skill Development Training Programme.

**PROSHIKA's Universal Education Programme.**

The Universal Education Programme, despite its main goal being the development of functional basic literacy skills, clearly also envisages an accompanying effect of social development. In alignment with Jennings' (1990) call for literacy training that is contextual and incorporated into broader and integrated educational approaches (as noted in Chapter Two), the Universal Education Programme sets out to make literacy education relevant to the development of more than the ability to simply read and write. As described in the Universal Education Programme manual:

The purpose of the Universal Education Programme is to make the poor people aware of possibilities and prospects which can improve the quality of life for themselves. PROSHIKA endeavours to eliminate illiteracy from among the organized group members and their children and thus enable them to lead a better and worthy life. This will make the impacts much more substantial and sustainable. The ability to read books, posters, signboards and newspapers opens new windows to gain knowledge. Literacy skills will assist the poor to participate effectively at all levels of society and thus functional abilities of the poor will be enhanced significantly. Learning about

legal rights, marriage, divorce, and minimum wage and learning how to deal with dowry, rape and other social issues will lead the poor to increase their levels of social wellbeing. (PROSHIKA, pp.1-2)

Literacy, critical awareness, and analytical skills are linked together in a Freireian manner (Freire, 2002), which takes PROSHIKA's literacy education beyond the simple mechanistic learning of the three Rs. In that regard, then, there is a clear element of social development *training* occurring within PROSHIKA's *education* programme, somewhat blurring the lines in the organization's own distinction between the two terms.

The Universal Education Programme is organized through the set-up of literacy centres in rural villages or urban slums, in small, usually rented, buildings. A group of 20 to 25 illiterate adults is selected from surrounding Primary Groups to participate in each literacy education session. The curriculum and resource materials are provided by PROSHIKA, and the teachers, referred to as facilitators, are recruited from the few of those amongst the local primary groups who have a minimum of eight years of formal education. These facilitators are then given a two-week training course to prepare them for the task of teaching basic literacy to adults. For their work as literacy facilitators, they are paid a small honorarium, an amount less than what they would earn as the lowest paid of the garment workers in Dhaka.

The basic adult literacy programme runs six days per week, two hours per day for six months, at the end of which the adults are expected to have a set of functional literacy and numerical skills necessary for day-to-day living. Literacy groups, like the Primary Groups, are gender segregated, with female groups meeting in the afternoons with a female facilitator and male groups meeting in the evenings with a male facilitator.

In Fulbaria, a small village near Dhaka, I met with members from two PROSHIKA Primary Groups: Shubhessa Mohila Samiti (Greeting Association for Women) and Khudra Bebshai Purus Samiti (Small Business Association for Men). For the occasion, the two groups agreed to meet together, with about half of each group, eight men and twelve women, in attendance. Of the 20 people at the meeting, only three had completed primary school (grade five). The rest of the 17 group members in attendance had at some point participated in PROSHIKA's Universal Education Programme.

Through a translator I asked these group members, "how has being literate affected your life?" The answers were inspiring. Several people commented that it simply gave them a feeling of pride just to be able to sign their own names. Another commonly shared sentiment was that with their newfound literacy skills they are able to help their children with their schoolwork. Many also reported that they could now write letters to family members in other parts of Bangladesh with whom they previously had no means by which to communicate. One man explained that he



could now read documents before signing them, and another agreed that he now knows himself what rules and regulations are rather than having to trust what someone else has told him. Another man explained that he is now able to keep track of the groups' accounts for micro-credit activities. There was a clear sense that members from both the male and female groups had not only learned to read and write, but felt socially empowered by their new literacy skills.

### **PROSHIKA's Human Development and Practical Skill Development Training Programmes.**

The two adult training programmes offered by PROSHIKA are often used in conjunction with one and other, but each is implemented separately and designed to serve different purposes. Beginning with the Human Development Training Programme, the ideology can again be linked to Freireian thought as seen in the following programme description:

Human development training can be seen as a systematic process of awareness building and conscientization. The objective of this training programme is to situate people's development endeavours in the larger social context and make them understand the social processes that intersect their efforts. (PROSHIKA, 2002b, p. 8)

As explained by one of PROSHIKA's deputy directors, PROSHIKA's founding principle was that there must be total human development, not just income earning development. PROSHIKA's Human Development Training Programme seems proof of this conviction, although there is an apparent discrepancy in that the Human Development Training Programme appears to be in place largely as a prerequisite to the Practical Skill Development Training Programme and its accompanying micro-credit programme, both solely serving towards income earning development. Nevertheless, the Human Development Training Programme is in place and has impacted on the lives of millions of people in Bangladesh.

Once a Primary Group has been established, human development training is introduced to "each and every group for the uniform development of the group members" (PROSHIKA, 2002a, p. 4). The programme is divided into six modules: poverty eradication, organization, women's empowerment, health education, environment and development, and democracy and voting rights, lasting in total seven to ten days, following which the Primary Group undergoes an evaluation. The group must demonstrate that they have adopted the Human Development Training into their lifestyle, and must also demonstrate the ability and commitment to save money. Based on these two criteria, the Primary Group receives a Group Development Stage (GDS) rating of zero to five. A high GDS rating makes the group eligible for Practical Skill Development Training and access to micro-credit through PROSHIKA's Employment and Income Generating Programme or Small

Economic Enterprise Development Programme. A low GDS rating earns the group dysfunctional status, making them ineligible for any further PROSHIKA support.

For successful Primary Groups, the Practical Skill Development Training Programme is then introduced, described by PROSHIKA (2002) as:

training meant for those who will eventually undertake different employment and income generating activities of their own. The objective of the training is to equip the participants with relevant knowledge and skills so that they can make informed decisions in the identification and implementation of various economic activities which will help them prevent erosions in economic, human and environmental resources. (p. 18)

Unlike the Human Development Training Programme, which is purposefully generic and intended towards the uniform development of group members (see above), the Practical Skill Development Training Programme is implemented based on needs identified by the local federation specific to each Primary Groups' available resources. Groups with access to suitable bodies of water might receive training in fisheries, whereas groups with access to land might receive training in livestock rearing or seed production. Training in sewing and driving is disconcertingly popular amongst groups, particularly in urban regions. Skill development training almost always comes in conjunction with micro-credit loans to help Primary Groups

establish small local businesses. Typical examples include loans to buy a few chickens, a water pump, or a sewing machine.

### ***BRAC***

BRAC, which was founded in Bangladesh shortly after independence as a small relief organization, has grown into one of the world's largest NGOs. This once small grass-roots organization has expanded to now include a full-time staff of thirty thousand and an equal number of part-time workers, and a long list of subsidiary companies including chains of handicraft stores, banks, tea plantations, an internet service provider, and a private university. BRAC looks and feels more like big business than a development organization, and is regarded by some to have outgrown its once personal touch. Regardless, BRAC's development programmes are renown and modeled after worldwide.

By looking at the following vision and mission statements, BRAC's commitment to social development and other ideological similarities to PROSHIKA are clear:

Vision: A just, enlightened, healthy and democratic Bangladesh free from hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and all forms of exploitation based on age, sex, religion and ethnicity.

Mission: BRAC works with people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease and other handicaps. With multifaceted development interventions, BRAC strives to bring about positive change in the quality of life of the poor people of Bangladesh. (BRAC, 2004)

Like PROSHIKA, BRAC declares itself committed to a system of combined social and economic development. As stated, “BRAC promotes income generation and social development of the poor, mostly landless rural people of Bangladesh through micro credit, health, education, and training programmes” (BRAC, 2004, p. 9). Here again the distinction between education and training can be seen. Moreover, BRAC particularly champions women’s development; BRAC’s Social Development Programme, in fact, is exclusively directed towards women. As a result, BRAC too has received recent criticism as part of the fundamentalist insurgency sweeping through Bangladesh, the gripe apparently being BRAC’s participation in educating females (McAdam, 2004).

The BRAC development model is also based on organization and implementation at the target group level. BRAC’s equivalent to PROSHIKA’s Primary Group is the Village Organization, each one consisting of 30 to 40 gender-segregated members. As explained by a BRAC Social Development Programme coordinator, the social entity of the Village Organization is of the utmost importance

to BRAC's development programme, as it provides opportunity for the sharing of issues and grievances which otherwise go unspoken.

BRAC (2004) describes its training programmes as being "grouped into two broad categories: Human Development and Management, and Occupational Skills Development" (p. 38). This broad distinction between human training and skills training is identical to PROSHIKA's, as is the purpose for each type of training programme. Once a Village Organization has been established, Human Development and Management Training is implemented to, as put by a BRAC Social Development Programme coordinator, get the Village Organization to a level where they can benefit from skill training and micro-credit. This initial human development training, thus, again appears largely in place as a stepping-stone towards economic development activities.

Once the members of a Village Organization have concluded their initial Human Development and Management Training, and also demonstrated the ability and commitment to save money, various forms of skill training with accompanying micro-credit through the Employment and Income Generation Programme are introduced. The focus of this programme is on the development of skills related to work typically performed by rural women: poultry and livestock raising, fisheries, agriculture, social forestry, and sericulture. Micro-credit loan sizes and the type of training provided vary depending on the group's degree of poverty, amount of land

ownership, amount of savings, demonstrated entrepreneurial skills, and attendance at BRAC meetings (BRAC, 2004).

In conjunction with the skills training and micro-credit, BRAC also introduces a Social Development Programme for women, which, in many ways, is a continuation of the initial Human Development and Management Training that a Village Organization receives before becoming eligible for skills training and micro-credit. Once a month Village Organization women members meet with BRAC facilitators to discuss issues in an attempt to increase their social, political, legal, and economic awareness. Some of the particulars discussed in these meetings include dowry, underage or illegal marriage, family law, violence against women, voting rights, and gender discrimination.

Aside from the work BRAC does in training, the organization is also heavily involved in education, though more so directed towards school-aged children than adults. A programme is in place, however, for adolescents who have come through BRAC's non-formal primary schools to help them retain literacy, numeric, and life skills through access to community libraries established for post literacy activities (BRAC, 2004, p. 33).

### ***USC Canada-Bangladesh***

USC Canada-Bangladesh is a much smaller NGO than either PROSHIKA or BRAC, seemingly still content operating under the grass-roots adage of small is

beautiful. As with PROSHIKA and BRAC, the organization was founded in post-liberation war relief efforts, and has been active in development work in Bangladesh since the early 1970s. In 1995 the organization launched its benchmark Adolescent Development Programme, and then in 1998 significantly expanded implementation of the programme through a five-year agreement with CIDA. Following the programme's great success, a second phase of the programme is now in development and due to commence shortly. Though the programme is designed for those aged 11 to 17, given the societal context, I believe that those within that age demographic certainly qualify for study in adult education.

Similarities to both PROSHIKA and BRAC's education and training programmes are evident in USC Canada-Bangladesh's (2004) Adolescent Development Programme description:

The Adolescent Development Programme (ADP) is a specially designed curriculum for the adolescents (both girls and boys) of Bangladesh to provide basic literacy and skill training through which they can achieve self-reliance and would be able to protect themselves from all sorts of social exploitation. (p. 11)

Essentially, The Adolescent Development Programme is in place as a recovery programme for those who have never attended or not completed primary school, and is designed to 'socially immunize' impoverished young men and women and



provide them with the life skills necessary to prepare them for adulthood. The programme lasts for eighteen months running two hours per day, six days per week, at the end of which participants have the functional literacy and numeric skills equivalent to a person with three years of formal education, and vastly improved social awareness and skills in areas such as hygiene, reproductive health, legal rights, and decision-making. Similar to PROSHIKA, and again in alignment with Jennings' prescription, USC Canada-Bangladesh's literacy education is made contextual and integrated into a broader programme of education. Different, however, from the type of training offered by either PROSHIKA or BRAC, the USC Canada-Bangladesh programme is intended towards the development of life skills more so than occupational skills, recognizing the need for this type of training as being the most crucial to a programme of overall social development.

Also unique to USC Canada-Bangladesh is the organization's six-step system, designed to bring both the families of the adolescents and the community at large into the education process. The rationale behind the six-step system is that social development training, in order to be effective, must reach to, and be participated in by, everybody in the community, not just the target group. The six steps in order are: I) primary selection of the adolescents. II) family development foundation training, III) a parent meeting, IV) basic literacy and skill training, V) a mass gathering, and, VI) couples training. Through this process, USC Canada-Bangladesh ensures that the families and communities of the adolescents who participate in the programme are not alienated from the process, but rather, that these

non-direct participant stakeholders are brought into the programme and encouraged to make contributions themselves as to what the adolescents are learning. Through this process, USC Canada-Bangladesh keeps itself accountable for ensuring that its education and training programmes are in line with the development needs of the entire community.

### *Summary of Findings*

The key finding of this research is that the NGO sector in Bangladesh is indeed filling the niche of providing social development training in accordance with the social purpose tradition of adult education. Aside from the three case studied NGOs, hundreds of others are active in developing and implementing programmes intended towards similar results. However, the social or human development training being provided by these NGOs most often appears to be in place simply as a capacity development precursor for skill development training and accompanying micro-credit programmes. As such, it can be inferred that social development is recognized, in Bangladesh, as being a step on the path towards the end goal of economic development rather than as a terminal development goal in itself.

Development programmes in Bangladesh are still primarily being designed for, and implemented in, rural areas. However, recognition of the need for urban initiatives is beginning to emerge. Both PROSHIKA and BRAC have recently established urban development programmes, and USC Canada-Bangladesh is now earmarking approximately 20% of its programming to be implemented in urban

regions of the country. It is consistently noted that urban populations pose a much more challenging target group for programme implementation due to their transient behaviour, lack of established community organization, and extremely dire living conditions.

Gender issues are extremely pervasive in development discourse in Bangladesh, particularly in light of current events and the spreading fundamentalism. The cultural dynamics of the country pose numerous challenges for development organizations; there is something paradoxical about trying to educate people about gender discrimination, family law, and family planning to always gender-segregated groups. Further, with the focus of so many NGOs being largely on women's target groups, in many ways, males are actually being excluded from the social development process.

Aside from annual reports published by each NGO listing the numbers of people who have participated in their various education and training programmes each year, there is very little available by which to measure the actual effectiveness or success of these programmes in improving people's standard of living. Those from within the NGOs admit to the tendency of quickly moving on to organize the next group without ever looking back to the previous group. When attempts are made to evaluate these programmes, consideration is solely based on before and after poverty assessments. Therefore, the success and sustainability of the current

social development training in Bangladesh is unknown, making it difficult to know if or how it should be modified in order to be most beneficial.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

### *A Change in Development Ideology and Practice*

Adult education used as an instrument for development, in its broadest sense, is an age-old practice. Understanding why and how adult education is used for development at any given time and in any given place necessitates first understanding the controlling development ideology at play. The field of international development, since what could be argued as its formal inception at the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 with the founding of The International Monetary Fund and The World Bank, in keeping with the Western ideals of capitalism and modernization, has been guided from its onset by an implicit faith in a programme of economic growth and industrialization. The initial basic strategy of international development was simply to pump money into the developing world in the form of infrastructure investment, the same as was successfully done to rejuvenate a war-torn Europe. The ensuing failure of those investments to generate the same economic growth results in the developing world as they had in post-war Europe, it was decided, was due to a deficiency in the people. As such, strategies were then turned to finding ways of raising the productivity of the poorest people of the developing world in order to better enable their participation in, and contribution to, their economies, and thus to the economic growth of their countries. For their productivity to be raised, it was decided that these people needed education, and, as a result of that decision, programmes of adult education were formalized in Bangladesh, as in most of the developing world, thinly disguised as social development, but serving almost entirely towards economic growth.

Unfortunately, after all these years there is little evidence to show that international development, particularly in economic measures, is occurring at any significant rate. For over sixty of the world's poorest countries, the process has instead arguably been one of de-development, as per-capita incomes have in fact decreased (Black, 2002). For the countries that have actually experienced any significant amount of economic growth, in most cases only a fraction of the population has benefited as inequality has widened enormously with wealth concentrating at the top.

Trying to understand international development in terms any other than economic is indeed a difficult task. The assessment of development is almost exclusively based on such measures as GDPs, GNPs, genie coefficients, national and international poverty lines, and dollars per day sustenance. Admittedly, it is important to recognize the role that economic growth does indeed play in development. However, after over 60 years of formal international development practice, with its often stagnant and sometimes even reversed results, it is time to acknowledge that basing development primarily on economic growth is dysfunctional. Development ideology must, alternatively, be re-thought to better recognize the other various dimensions of development aside from the economic, in particular the social dimension. Development practice must acknowledge the existence of and purposefully target social poverty as aggressively as it does economic poverty, and adult education, as an instrument for development, must once

again be recognized as a social rather than economic commodity, and once again focus on a social rather than economic purpose agenda.

The Bangladesh NGOs case-studied in this research show varying degrees of commitment to this alternative development ideology. It can be fairly assessed that for both PROSHIKA and BRAC, despite the proclamations in their vision statements of their commitment to such social causes as justice, democracy, enlightenment, and liberation from all forms of exploitation, economic development is still held as the ultimate goal, and any social development fostered along the way is intended more as a means to an end. USC Canada-Bangladesh proved to be more progressive in terms of embracing a more purely social development agenda, placing much less emphasis on the development of *economically productive citizens*, and much more on the development of *socially productive citizens*. More support is needed from the Government of Bangladesh and the various donor agencies of the world for NGOs that share a similar development ideology and practice to that of USC Canada-Bangladesh. Such NGOs, without the aid of interest earnings that benefit the micro-credit development organizations, rely completely on the support of external funding to develop and implement programming. Whereas PROSHIKA is still somewhat able to carry out its day-to-day operations despite an external funding block, USC Canada-Bangladesh simply would not be able to.

In order for more support to be provided for NGOs like USC Canada-Bangladesh, one of the challenges will be finding more effective measures by which

to evaluate their success. As was noted earlier, at this time very little is being done to evaluate the long-term success and sustainability of the development cultivated by NGOs in Bangladesh, aside from before and after target group poverty assessments. More work will thus need to be done in order to identify better ways of measuring success that are commensurate with the intended development outcomes. If, for example, a literacy training programme purports to raise conscientization, then conscientization and its intended praxis outcomes, not just the ability to read and write, must be evaluated in order to determine the successfulness of that programme and its implementing NGO.

### ***Community Organization and Socially Productive and Responsible Citizenship***

Regardless of whether development is envisioned and pursued under a more economic or social purpose agenda, the value of community organization must be recognized and used to the advantage of supportive adult education programmes. PROSHIKA and BRAC have proven the importance of having their, what I call *capital communities*, Primary Groups and Village Organizations for the implementation of their development programmes. For PROSHIKA and BRAC, these capital communities serve perfectly for providing the space and place to bring together people endeavouring to pursue various economic development activities, and to provide an entity for the local enforcement of *economically responsible citizenship*. Alternatively, *social communities* must be forged to provide the space and place to bring together people endeavouring to pursue various social



development activities, and to provide an entity for the local enforcement of *socially responsible citizenship*.

Such an alternative would ultimately mean abandoning the target group approach that has become the trend for development practice in Bangladesh. Community development and community education fundamentally must reach entire communities, not just target groups within communities. Clearly, however, there would be logistical challenges in attempting to directly include entire communities in any education or development programme. To that end, a revised purpose for the Primary Group or Village Organization type entity could be employed – to act as a nucleus for the development, and subsequent dissemination to the community at large, of socially grounded knowledge and skills. As opposed to current development strategies which are designed to benefit only those people and their families who are actually members of each Primary Group or Village Organization, those people would instead act as agents for the development of the entire community under this alternative model. To a certain extent, USC Canada-Bangladesh's Adolescent Development Programme is already doing just that by including parent meetings and community gatherings in its six-step process. However, PROSHIKA and BRAC have yet to demonstrate any similar process for taking development from the target group to the rest of the community.

The concept of fostering community organization for involvement in development programmes will be nowhere more challenging in Bangladesh than in

the urban regions of the country. Despite that urban living physically brings people closer together, socially it pulls people apart. The family and social unity found in rural villages, often necessary simply for survival, evaporates once people move into the cities. Urban slum dwellers do not share the same social cohesion with their neighbours as those living in rural villages. Add to that the highly insecure settlement of the slum areas, and the often transient behaviour of slum dwellers, and there is little reason or opportunity for a strong sense of community to ever be established. However, as urban populations continue to grow, and urban development initiatives become even more necessary, ways will need to be sought out for enhancing urban community organization in order to better facilitate development practices. One possibility would be to organize communities based on employment rather than geographical location. Garment factory workers already have established associations, but there is nothing equivalent, to my knowledge, for the rickshaw wallahs, brick breakers, street hawkers, domestic workers, or other similar labour groups. Bringing people together by their type of employment would be one way to foster unity within the urban slums, and create the necessary hubs for community development and adult education.

### ***The Continued Importance of Literacy in International Adult Education***

In supporting this alternative social development model, with its focus on a revived practice of community development over the target group approach, and its emphasis on socially over economically productive and responsible citizenship, adult education will continue to have a crucial role to play. In fact, its role may

become even more crucial than under the economic growth model in that it will require a certain amount of education just for people to realize the benefit of receiving further education of this type. Without the bait of a loan and the promise of higher income to entice people into prefatory social development training, as is now the practice of the micro-credit NGOs, new ways will need to be found to encourage people to participate in social development education.

One possible avenue is through language and literacy education. Language in Bangladesh is firmly ingrained in the cultural heritage of the country. Next to the Muslim Eid holiday, the most celebrated day in the country is Language Day, which commemorates the struggle to preserve the Bengali language during the time when the country was East Pakistan. Bangladeshi's are fiercely proud of their language and the heritage that it holds. As noted earlier though, adult literacy levels remain extremely low in Bangladesh, the ninth worst in the world, having benefited little from years of mass literacy campaigns. The Government of Bangladesh, however, remains committed to eradicating illiteracy by 2015, and thus, support and funding are readily available for literacy training programmes. Literacy must then become the hook that replaces the loan. Literacy programmes such as REFLECT and the Community Literacy Approach, as discussed in Chapter Two, would provide the perfect type of instrument for a combined programme of literacy and social development training, and fit perfectly into the community development model, whether the communities are defined geographically or otherwise, such as the proposed labour group communities. From Freire we know that the relationship

between literacy training and social development is a symbiotic one; each is best learned through the other. Thus, for those NGOs, such as PROSHIKA, which offer both literacy education and social development training but as two distinct programmes, the two should be combined. For those NGOs offering one but not the other, such as BRAC, which offers social development training but not adult literacy education per say, a move should be made to bring in whichever component is missing and combine it with the other.

Post-literacy programmes would have an equally valuable role to play by providing an incentive for drawing those already literate people within communities into the social development process. NGOs, for example, by setting up reading centres and discussion groups, could effectively turn their social development from a six-month programme into a lifelong process. The key to these post-literacy programmes, as with the literacy programmes, is in ensuring that the content is contextual and relevant to the day-to-day living needs of the target community. Another possible post-literacy initiative would be for NGOs to increase their participation in the community jattras (folk theatre presentations), by organizing the literate members of communities to script and perform jattras relevant to their own community's issues, rather than organizing travelling troupes which present more generic topics, as is the common practice now. This would also complement the Community Literacy Approach's commitment to the oral tradition of communication.

### ***Future Prospects for Social Development and Adult Education Practice and Research***

One of the greatest challenges faced by adult educators choosing to serve towards a social development purpose agenda is in understanding that what in fact constitutes socially productive and responsible citizenship fundamentally varies across culture, time, and place. Perhaps even more fundamental is the need for understanding that the very word 'development', and all of the meaning it holds, is so often loaded with Western norms, and mistreated easily becomes an agent of hegemony and oppression (Ake, 1996 & Bawtree & Rahnema, 1997). Without exercising due caution, social development practice easily falls victim to the same blunder that economic growth development practice has in the past in holding free market capitalism and industrial modernization as the universally accepted targets and standards of development.

That being the case, we must resist viewing any type of social development as a programme that can simply be packaged and exported. Instead, development must be understood as a process which is local, contextual, and participatory, and that is envisioned as an exchange rather than as a transmission. Here again the words of Freire (1989) seem relevant. In line with this thought, I believe the participation of the several hundred smaller Bangladesh NGOs active in providing education and training becomes critical. Their lesser profiles, as compared to BRAC and PROSHIKA, make them no less effective in terms of the quality and appropriateness of the social development programmes which they are able to

facilitate. Arguably, their continued commitment to fostering social development initiatives despite their lesser profiles provides testimony to their more altruistic intentions. The inability of these smaller NGOs to garner international recognition through publishing glossy annual reports or by attending international conferences should not prevent them from receiving support from local government and foreign donor agencies, but the reality being that it does should not be viewed as a barrier. Facilitation of community based social development education, in fact, requires very little monetary support.

Despite the earlier decree that development must be local, contextual, and participatory, that is not to say that there is no room for *outsiders* in the process. Much can be learned from an external perspective, and certainly those from outside the community, or even the country, may be perfectly suited to providing impetus and facilitation for the process, so long as it is not entirely prescriptive. Further research on the subject by those external to the communities will also continue to provide crucial understanding regarding effective social development adult education practice. Specifically, one area where further investigation would be beneficial to better understanding the adult education and training being offered by Bangladesh NGOs is the teacher/facilitator preparation programmes organized by them. As discussed earlier, it is standard practice that this preparation last between one and two weeks, in which time the facilitator is expected to develop all of the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively facilitate the process. Much could be learned from analyzing the process and the contents of that training.

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